

***NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE INSTRUCTION 10-402***

***APRIL 19, 2005***

***Operations and Services***

***Fire Weather Services, NWSPD 10-4***

***FIRE WEATHER SERVICES ON-SITE SUPPORT***

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***SUMMARY OF REVISIONS:***

This directive supersedes NWSI 10-402, “Fire Weather Services On-Site Support” dated April 22, 2004. The following revisions were made to this instruction:

- (1) The Staff Meteorologist to NIFC (SMN) position has been renamed “National Fire Weather Operations Coordinator (NFWOC)”.
- (2) Section 1.3 - Regions report of IMETs, locations, and phone numbers now needs to be complete and sent to NFWOC by January 31<sup>st</sup>.
- (3) Section on dispatching separated into Land Management versus Non-Land Management Agency dispatches (section 2 versus 3) given anticipation of increased activity in all hazards support.
- (4) Section 2.4 – Regions and MICs need to provide IMETs with blanket travel orders for each fiscal year.
- (5) Section 5.3 – IMETs now required to get an Incident Personnel Performance Rating, if possible, at the end of each wildland fire dispatch.
- (6) Section 5.4 – Some minor changes to post-dispatch procedures and documentation.
- (7) Section 5.4 – Regional Program Managers are required to send a spreadsheet to the National Fire Weather Program Manager on at least a quarterly basis in order to monitor the Fire Agency reimbursable account. The Reimbursable Summary Spreadsheet will be made available to the regions for this purpose.

Signed  
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Dennis McCarthy  
Director, Office of Climate,  
Water, and Weather Services

4/5/05  
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Date

## Fire Weather Services On-Site Support

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1. Incident Support. On-site forecast service is a non-routine service available from WFOs with designated Incident Meteorologists (IMETs). The NWS will provide IMET services upon request of federal, state, tribal, or local government fire agencies in support of wildfires. This support typically includes dispatches to Incident Command Posts, but may also include dispatches to land management coordination center, dispatch centers, and area commands.

IMET support will also be considered for non-wildfire situations if resources permit. Such uses will be limited to requests of federal fire agencies participating in the Interagency Agreement (NWS Instruction 10-406), and requests by a public safety official who represents such support as essential to public safety (see section 4.2 of 10-401).

1.1 Certification of IMETs. The NWS Regional Headquarters, through the local MICs, will designate as IMETs those persons qualified to provide on-site services in an Incident Command System using the All Hazards Meteorological Response System (AMRS). Training and certification requirements are listed under Instruction 10-405 (Fire Weather Services Training and Professional Development). The IMET must maintain proficiency in providing on-site forecast services and should participate in training conducted jointly by the NWS and the customers.

Regional program managers must ensure IMET meteorological support equipment familiarization is scheduled as needed and designated IMETs remain certified.

1.2 On-Site Services Equipment. The AMRS units, Atmospheric Theodolite Meteorological Units (ATMU), and FireRAWS (Fire Remote Automated Weather Station) are the main pieces of equipment used by IMETs on deployment, and like the IMETs, considered national fire fighting resources. The AMRSs are used to provide a mobile platform for data collection and forecast preparation. The ATMU is used to take winds aloft measurements at the site. FireRAWS provide on-site meteorological observation capabilities for the incident, and are maintained and owned by the Bureau of Land Management's RAWS Depot at the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC). FireRAWS are dispatched and configured at the fire site by land management agency technicians.

Only trained personnel will operate the AMRS, and AMRSs will only be dispatched to an incident when a certified IMET is requested. The National Fire Weather Operations Coordinator (NFWOC) in coordination with the Regional Program Managers will be responsible for positioning the AMRSs at various WFOs around the country.

The ATMUs are generally stored in interagency caches. Seasonal changes in the cache locations of the ATMUs will be coordinated through Regional Headquarters and the NFWOC. Units may be pre-positioned to caches anywhere in the country as fire danger requires.

Configuration and management of AMRSs and ATMUs will reside with the National Fire Weather Program Manager (NFWPM) and the NFWOC in coordination with the Regional Program Managers.

Each Region will assign routine maintenance and restocking responsibility and property

management for AMRSs and ATMUs to specific NWS offices. The MICs of these offices should ensure restocking and maintenance of the equipment is accomplished before the equipment is dispatched again. The NFWOC and NFWPM should ensure that caching agencies will allow access to cached ATMUs by NWS staff for the purpose of restocking, maintenance, and training.

The IMET Handbook contains current information on contact points for maintenance and repair of AMRSs and ATMUs.

1.3 Availability of IMETs. All Regions should ensure there are a sufficient number of trained IMETs to meet normal requests for on-site services. By January 31<sup>st</sup> of each year, the Regions will advise the NFWOC in Boise, ID, of the following:

- a. Name and location of currently certified IMETs.
- b. A 24-hour telephone number where the IMET's home office can be reached.

The Regions should also keep the NFWOC up-to-date on any changes in the status of certified IMETs.

The IMET should always be prepared to serve on an incident, especially during the normal fire season. Availability of the IMET will be determined by the local MIC and the IMET. When an IMET knows in advance that he/she will be unavailable for reasons such as annual leave, station staffing shortages, or personal needs, the MIC and the IMET will note his/her unavailable status on the IMET non-availability roster. This roster will be posted on an internal NWS website. The NFWOC will ensure all IMETs are provided URL and other pertinent information for this site annually. This roster will be used by the NFWOC to determine IMET non-availability for dispatch when any office is unable to fill a request.

2. IMET Request and Dispatch for Land Management Agencies. Request and dispatch of IMETs and equipment (AMRSs, ATMUs, and FireRAWS) should be accomplished through the National Resource Coordination System.

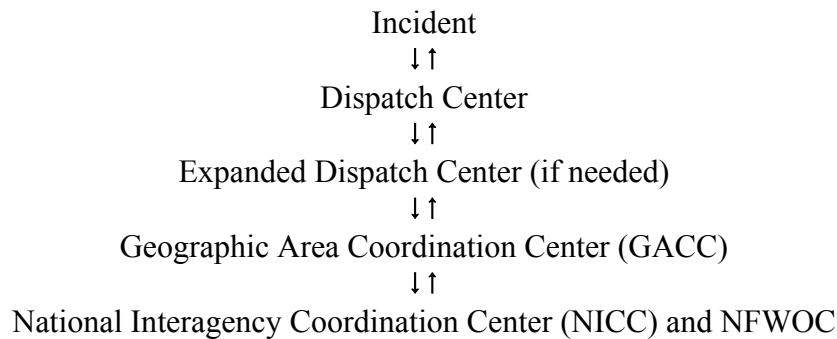
2.1 National Resource Coordination System. The components and functional roles of the major elements of the National Resource Coordination System as related to land management support consists of:

- a. Incidents. Orders for all resources, including NWS assets, are generated at the incident and forwarded to the local dispatch center.
- b. Dispatch Centers. Dispatch centers are responsible for providing logistical support to initial attack and project fires at the unit (Forest, Park, District, etc.) level. A dispatch center requests support from a Geographic Area Coordination Center (GACC) when resources on a unit are unavailable or are exhausted.
- c. Expanded Dispatch. During periods of increased fire activity, an expanded dispatch center may be established to provide enhanced support to large or complex incidents.
- d. Geographic Area Coordination Centers. GACCs act as focal points for internal

and external requests not filled at the local dispatch centers. If the resource is not available within their geographic area, the resource request is forwarded to the National Interagency Coordination Center (NICC) at Boise, ID.

- e. National Interagency Coordination Center. NICC is responsible for coordinating movement of all resources between GACCs. NICC is located on the campus of NIFC.

Resource orders follow a systematic sequence, beginning at the incident and then flowing through the system as illustrated below. At the level where the order is filled, the flow reverses back to the incident.



2.2 Requests for IMETs. Resource orders for an IMET in support of a wildland fire incident will follow a similar path to the one presented in 2.1 above. MICs are responsible for responding to all user agency requests for IMETs to support wildland fires within his/her area of responsibility. Hence, the MIC will either promptly dispatch his/her IMET or notify the dispatch center that he/she is unable to fill the order. If a dispatch center cannot fill the order locally, then dispatch procedures following the path described in 2.1 above are followed. The NFWOC will facilitate finding an IMET at the regional or national level.

If the NICC is at National Preparedness Level 4 or 5, then MICs will consult the NFWOC before dispatching any of his/her IMETs.

Requests for IMET/AMRS support to non-wildland fire events are left to the discretion of the local MIC and appropriate Regional Headquarters. The NFWOC should be contacted if assistance is needed in filling these requests from outside the fire weather service area.

2.3 IMET Dispatch Coordination and Notification. Since IMET dispatches are filled at the local, regional, or national level, coordination and notification are very important in maintaining a viable system of response.

- a. IMETs must keep the MIC informed of their availability for on-site support.
- b. MICs of WFOs with IMETs will report all IMET operational status changes immediately to the NFWOC in Boise and the appropriate Regional Program Manager. The WFO Boise senior forecaster will record this information when the NFWOC is not available.
- c. Regional Headquarters will work with the NFWOC to ensure sufficient on-site

capability. To help meet this requirement, Regional Program Managers should keep the NFWOC up-to-date on any known status changes of their region's IMETs.

- d. When the NFWOC receives a request for an IMET dispatch, the request should be coordinated with the MIC and IMET, the affected Region, and NIFC logistics personnel. The NFWOC should also notify the Regions and MICs when fire danger activity is increasing over an area for which they are not responsible, but could impact their IMETs.

The NFWOC will maintain a status report of the condition and location of all AMRSs, ATMUs and IMETs and report that status to the regions and the NFWPM. This will include any change in WFO capabilities to meet IMET support services. The NFWOC will prepare an end of the year report summarizing IMET dispatches nationally and by Region. This report will be provided to Regional and National Headquarters annually.

2.4 Blanket Travel Orders. MICs at WFOs with IMETs should provide the IMET with a blanket travel order (NOAA Form 42-5) for each fiscal year. These orders will help expedite the IMET travel to a fire at off-hours. These orders can be used temporarily by the IMET until administrative staff at his/her home WFO has an opportunity to produce a "Travel Manager" travel order.

2.5 Procedures for a Dispatch. Once a WFO receives a call for a dispatch and agrees to support the dispatch, the following procedure should be followed (this process is for a wildfire; the procedure may be similar for non-wildfire events):

- a. The MIC will inform his/her Regional Program Manager and the NFWOC immediately if the request was filled at the WFO fire weather service area level. The WFO Boise Senior Forecaster will record this information when the NFWOC is not available.
- b. The IMET should coordinate with the NFWOC and make sure an AMRS is available.
- c. The IMET should get the proper documentation in order. He/she will obtain and/or complete the following:
  - (1) Overhead Resource Order from the requesting agency dispatch center or GACC
  - (2) Travel Order (local or regional blanket or new order each dispatch)
  - (3) Travel Itinerary from agency arranging travel (usually the GACC or dispatch center)
- d. In almost all cases, the IMET will transport the AMRS to the fire. In rare cases where an AMRS is sent from a different location, the IMET will be responsible for tracking its transportation to the fire.
- e. The IMET should prepare an initial briefing and then travel to the fire.

3. Requests for IMETs from Non-Land Management Agencies. Since IMETs, AMRSs,

ATMUs, and FireRAWS are all national resources, requests from non-land management personnel (such as emergency managers in a HAZMAT incident) should be handled in a manner similar to the procedure described above. In the case of an emergency manager, the dispatch center may be a city, county, or state center. Requests may be received at the closest WFO. Since only a portion of the WFOs have IMETs, the WFO should coordinate with their Regional Headquarters and the Regions should coordinate with the NFWOC on these types of requests. If the closest WFO cannot fill the request, the MIC will contact the responsible Regional Headquarters. The Region should then coordinate with the NFWOC to provide the IMET and resources. If the request is filled by the local WFO, the responsible Region and the NFWOC should be notified of the dispatch as soon as possible.

#### 4. Incident Operations.

4.1 On-Site Procedures. The IMET should do the following upon arrival at an incident (each incident command center and its personnel may operate differently, so some variance to the procedure can be expected):

- a. The IMET should coordinate with the WFO that has fire weather responsibility in the affected area as soon as possible. This coordination is best done by visiting the WFO on the way to the incident. If this is not possible, the IMET should call the local WFO as soon as possible after checking into the incident. Thereafter, the IMET should coordinate with the local WFO on a daily basis at a minimum (see section 3.2).
- b. Upon arrival at the incident, the IMET should check in with payroll, meet the Plans Section Chief (PSC) and Fire Behavior Analyst (FBAN) to give a weather briefing and get his/her work assignment.
- c. The IMET should coordinate with the FBAN and determine if additional support equipment should be ordered (e.g., FireRAWS, ATMU, etc.).
- d. While at the incident, the IMET will obtain and/or complete the following:
  - (1) Crew Time Report for daily time keeping
  - (2) Emergency Fire Fighter Time Report (known as Red Dog Report in the firefighting agencies) for payroll
  - (3) AMRS Operations Report
  - (4) AMRS Daily Weather Log
  - (5) AMRS and if needed, ATMU Maintenance checklist
  - (6) Other documentation as required by the incident
- e. Forecast duties will vary with incident management team requirements, but the IMET should expect to provide daily weather forecasts for the incident, participate in shift briefings, planning and strategy meetings, and coordinate daily with the local WFO and/or with other IMETs at nearby incidents.
- f. The IMET will set-up, operate, and maintain the AMRS. Directions for use of the equipment are contained in the IMET Handbook.
- g. The IMET must keep his/her MIC and the NFWOC informed of his/her status while on the incident.

4.2 Coordination on Incidents. The IMET and local WFO/s should coordinate at least on a daily basis. The local WFO will coordinate with, or at least notify, the IMET of any significant weather threatening the site, and of any watches or warnings they plan to issue that include the incident or nearby areas. If the IMET is located at an incident without phone communication, the WFO should notify the local dispatch office of these types of critical conditions or forecasts, and the dispatch office should be encouraged to then notify the incident and/or IMET.

In cases of watch or warning issuances by the local WFO, the IMET should defer to the local office. However, in the absence of a watch or warning from the local WFO, the IMET has discretion to issue a watch or warning for the incident only. The IMET will coordinate with the local WFO, or in the absence of time, will notify the local WFO of any such issuances as soon as is practicable.

In instances of multiple IMETs dispatched to a single WFO fire weather service area, the Regions and the NFWOC should coordinate and determine the necessity for regularly scheduled conference calls. If conference calls are considered necessary, the Regions should assist the WFO MIC in setting up the calls. The calls should include the WFO forecasters, the IMETs, and the NFWOC. Other nearby WFOs and any IMETs in that WFO's service area may also be included in the call.

4.3 Hazardous Duty. Regulations governing hazard pay are described in the Code of Federal Regulations (5 CFR 550.901). Duty performed under circumstances that could contribute to an accident resulting in serious injury or death is considered hazardous. However, hazard pay is not authorized for duty entered into voluntarily.

4.3.1 Hazard Pay. An IMET may receive hazard pay differential when he/she is required to perform duties associated with responsibilities of the IMET in the immediate vicinity of the fire line. Examples of these duties include:

- Visiting the fire line to conduct a reconnaissance of the terrain (in order to become familiar with the topography that may influence the microclimate and behavior of the fire),
- Assisting the FBAN or RAWs technicians in siting portable weather observation stations (FireRAWS).

The IMET must receive permission from the FBAN, PSC, or Incident Commander (IC) to visit the fire line. The IMET must be accompanied by fire line certified agency personnel when traveling to the fire line.

The PSC or IC has final authority for approving hazard pay differential for IMETs. When authorized, the IMET will enter hazard pay differential on incident time and attendance records (Red Dog) and gain approval by signature of the PSC. Upon return, the IMET's NWS supervisor will annotate the NWS employee's time and attendance records and attach a copy of the incident time sheet. In addition, the hazard pay hours must be separated from the overtime hours and added to the reimbursable form for payment by the fire.



4.3.2 Non-Hazard Situations. IMETs should not expect to perform activities routinely that are "hazardous" and qualify for hazard pay (i.e., daily trips to the fire line are not required and will be considered routine and voluntary). It has also been determined that aircraft reconnaissance, while desirable, is not required and will be considered voluntary for NWS personnel.

4.4 Duration of Dispatches. The amount of time an IMET will be needed on an incident varies, ranging from a few days to several weeks. As a matter of safety, length of individual IMET dispatches, and hours worked per day, will mirror national wildland firefighter policy as set forth in the National Interagency Mobilization Guide by the firefighting agencies at NIFC. Dispatches and length of workdays may be shorter, as conditions warrant. Dispatches and length of workdays may be longer, with approval from the Incident Commander and the NFWOC.

5. Release from an Incident. When a fire is declared contained or controlled, the IMET should assess, in conjunction with the FBAN and PSC, the time requirement for further on-site weather support. The IMET will then relay a tentative time of release to his or her home office, the NFWOC, and to the Regional Program Manager. Release from an incident must be fully coordinated with the incident management team.

The NFWOC will coordinate the rotation of IMETs to fires exceeding two weeks. There should be a 1 to 2 day overlap between the departing IMET and his or her replacement. The outgoing IMET is responsible for briefing the replacement IMET, ensuring that he or she is fully integrated into the incident command system.

A departing IMET will follow the proper demobilization procedures (as stated in the National Interagency Mobilization Guide), coordinating his or her release and transportation with the incident management officials, which may include the FBAN, PSC, and the IC.

5.1 AMRS Release. Upon release from a contained or controlled fire, the IMET will be responsible for disassembling and packing the AMRS, and returning the unit to its assigned WFO location. In most cases, this location will be the IMET's home WFO.

If an IMET uses an AMRS that is not issued to him/her, the IMET will complete the AMRS Maintenance Checklist and place it in the AMRS container where the office responsible for its care can find it. This information should also be noted in the AMRS Operations Report.

5.2 ATMU Release. If an ATMU has been ordered for a fire, then upon release from a contained or controlled fire, the IMET will be responsible for disassembling and packing the ATMU and returning the unit to its assigned cache. In most cases, this will be done by returning the ATMU to the supply unit on the fire, but in some rare cases, if the IMET has driven to the fire, he/she may drive the ATMU back to a cache.

The IMET will complete the ATMU Maintenance Checklist and replace it in the ATMU container where the office responsible for its care can find it. This information should also be noted in the AMRS Operations Report.

5.3 Evaluations. IMETs should request an Incident Personnel Performance Rating (form NFES 1576) from the FBAN or PSC prior to departure (or similar evaluation for non-wildland fire incidents). On the rare occasion that this is not possible, the IMET must inform the NFWOC that one cannot be obtained. A copy of the evaluation will be sent to the NFWOC.

5.4 Post-Dispatch Documentation. The IMET will document the dispatch using the appropriate forms. Most of the administrative paperwork is accomplished by the IMET upon return to his/her home office with assistance from the WFO Administrative Support Assistant. The MIC will allow the IMET sufficient time (normally 1 full working day) to complete post-incident administrative duties.

Upon returning from an incident, the IMET will complete the following:

- Travel Voucher
- Time and Attendance Reports
- Report of Reimbursable Expenses

Copies of paperwork will be distributed as follows:

- WFO/Meteorologist-in-Charge (MIC)
  - AMRS Operations Report (copy)
  - AMRS Daily Weather Log (copy)
  - Travel voucher (copy) with copies of receipts
  - Travel order (copy)
  - Time and attendance reports with copies of Emergency Fire Fighter Time Report (Red Dog)
  - Report of Reimbursable Expenses (copy)
- Administrative Support Center (ASC)
  - Travel voucher (original) with copies of receipts
  - Travel order (copy)
- Regional Program Manager
  - Travel voucher (copy) with copies of receipts
  - Travel order (copy)
  - Report of Reimbursable Expenses (original)
  - Emergency Incident Time Report (Red Dog) (original)
  - Resource Order (copy)
  - Certified T & A of IMET and other staff who earned overtime due to dispatch (copies)
  - AMRS Operations Report (copy)
  - AMRS Daily Weather Log (copy)
- National Fire Weather Operations Coordinator (NFWOC)
  - AMRS Operations Report (copy)
  - AMRS Daily Weather Log (copy)
  - Incident Personnel Performance Rating (NFES 1576) or similar evaluation (copy)

Additionally, the IMET should send copies of all fire forecasts, watches and warnings, and the daily weather log to the WFO in whose area the associated fire command center was located. This WFO will archive these data for at least five years.

The IMET should keep copies of all paperwork. Paperwork should be retained on-station for at least five years.

The MIC of the dispatched IMET will ensure the IMETs T&A and fire reimbursable documentation covering time spent on a wildfire is properly encoded. The MIC will submit financial reimbursable documents for IMET and WFO staff overtime and other direct fire incident expenses to the Regional Program Manager.

The Regions will ensure appropriate financial documents are filed with NOAA's Office of the Comptroller, Operations Section, in order to recover reimbursable expenses from customers.

The Regional Program Managers will forward copies of the Reimbursable Summary Spreadsheet to the NFWPM on at least a quarterly basis. This spreadsheet will allow the NFWPM to monitor the Fire Agency reimbursable account and ensure reimbursement per the Interagency Agreement (NWSI 10-406).